

Members ask why the soldiers are being punished for mistakes outside their control, request Inspector General to investigate violated contracts both in Oregon and nationwide

July 20, 2011

Washington, D.C. – The Oregon congressional delegation today asked the Inspector General of the National Guard Bureau to investigate the Guard's refusal to honor bonus contracts signed by members of the Oregon National Guard.

Six members of the Oregon National Guard have contacted Oregon's congressional offices seeking help after the Guard failed to honor the second half of bonus contracts.

The letter from the delegation to the Inspector General cites the example of PFC Chelsea Wells, a Milton-Freewater native, who enlisted in Dec. 2007 and signed a contract for a \$20,000 bonus. The first half of the bonus was paid on time following her initial training. However, when she was due to receive the second half of her bonus in Dec. 2010, the Guard refused to pay, claiming that she was never qualified in the first place. Worse yet, the Guard said it intends to seek recoupment of the first half of the bonus.

"As a country, we ask these brave men and women to serve their country and promise to compensate them for their service," the members of Oregon's Congressional delegation wrote to Inspector General H. Cronin Byrd. "These soldiers should not be punished due to a potential clerical error by the Guard. They deserve better than a bait and switch from Uncle Sam."

"We request that you swiftly investigate the violation of these contracts by the Guard to resolve why these soldiers will be unfairly punished for mistakes outside of their control," they wrote. "Furthermore, we understand that the problem is not isolated to soldiers in Oregon, and we fear that many soldiers that have been denied some or all of their bonuses have not come forward to tell their stories. How many soldiers, both in Oregon and nationwide, have been denied bonuses in a similar fashion to PFC Wells?"

Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, and U.S. Reps. Greg Walden, Peter DeFazio, Earl Blumenauer, Kurt Schrader, and David Wu signed the letter.

The full text of the letter is below.

Mr. H. Cronin Byrd
Inspector General, National Guard Bureau
Arlington Hall Station
111 S George Mason Drive
Bldg 2, 3rd Floor-TI342
Arlington, VA 22204

Dear Mr. Byrd:

We write today to request an investigation into the National Guard reneging on the bonus annex of the enlistment contracts of Oregon National Guard soldiers. Six members of the Oregon National Guard have contacted our offices to inform us that the National Guard has refused to honor the second half of bonus contracts they signed in late 2007.

For example, PFC Chelsea Wells, a native of Milton-Freewater, enlisted as a 35F (intelligence analyst) in December 2007. She signed an annex to her enlistment document (DD Form 4) that stipulated she would receive a \$20,000 bonus for enlisting in a critical Military Occupation Specialty (MOS). The agreement, signed by the enlisting official at her processing station, also stipulated that she would receive the first half of the bonus upon completion of her initial training, and the second half of the bonus upon completion of 36 months of enlistment.

PFC Wells indeed received the first half of her bonus — \$10,000 — upon completion of her initial training. However, when the 36-month anniversary of her enlistment arrived, she was denied the second half of her bonus.

Following an official congressional inquiry, the National Guard Bureau Office of Legislative Liaison stated that the payments have been denied because her MOS was not on the critical skills list on the date of enlistment. However, the annex offered to and signed by PFC Wells

very specifically stated that her MOS, 35F, was indeed a “Critical Skill MOS.”

What’s even more disturbing is that the National Guard says it intends to recoup the first half of PFC Wells’ bonus — \$10,000.

The stories of at least five more Oregon National Guard soldiers, all who enlisted during the latter months of 2007, are all similar. However, the soldiers enlisted in various MOS specialties, and were not all processed through the same facility.

As a country, we ask these brave men and women to serve their country and promise to compensate them for their service. These soldiers should not be punished due a potential clerical error by the Guard. They deserve better than a bait and switch from Uncle Sam.

We request that you swiftly investigate the violation of these contracts by the Guard to resolve why these soldiers will be unfairly punished for mistakes outside of their control. Furthermore, we understand that the problem is not isolated to soldiers in Oregon, and we fear that many soldiers that have been denied some or all of their bonuses have not come forward to tell their stories. How many soldiers, both in Oregon and nationwide, have been denied bonuses in a similar fashion to PFC Wells?

We have attached PFC Wells’ bonus annex and the response from the National Guard Bureau for your review. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

/s

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